DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 396 056 UD 031 014

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TITLE	Children of the Drum: Equity Pedagogy, Knowledge Construction, and African American Student Learning through Drama.
PUB DATE	Apr 95
NOTE	34p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New York, NY, April 1995).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Alienation; Black Culture; *Black Students; *Constructivism (Learning); Cultural Awareness; *Cultural Background; *Drama; Drama Workshops; Elementary Secondary Education; Equal Education; *Self Efficacy; *Student Attitudes; Student Motivation; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS	African Americans; *Knowledge Acquisition; Student Empowerment

ABSTRACT

This paper is an analysis of a project that involved African American middle school students in a drama program that was based on their lives and the stories of their community. Students were trained in performance skills, participated in the development of a script, and then performed the script in local schools. The 10 student participants, 5 males and 5 females, were African Americans with difficulties in school ranging from occasional or perpetual alienation and boredom to disruptive behavior. The drama program was inherently culturally relevant and based on the core values of African American culture. Students were able to recognize themselves and their culture as valued as they became active agents in the construction and expression of knowledge. Students demonstrated a sense of joy and commitment simulated by the empowerment of self expression. A theoretical framework was developed in which the attributes of drama as culturally relevant instruction for African American students releases creativity, engaging the interaction between self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation. (Contains 1 figure and 66 references.) (SLD)

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Children of the Drum: Equity Pedagogy, Knowledge Construction, and African American Student Learning through Drama

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Prepared for presentation at the American Educational Researchers Association annual meeting.

New York, New York, April, 1995

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The statistics for African American students in public schools are alarming. Suspension rates for African American students are twice that of White students, and 20% of African American students are likely to drop out of school. (Hurn, 1993; Nielson, 1991). Researchers and educators repeatedly compare African American students to their White counterparts and find Black children lower in achievement, IQ, creativity, reading, writing, and otherwise culturally or mentally deficient(Jenson, 1975; Herrnstein, 1973 Sikka, 1992). Not surprisingly, the researchers and educators who point to the deficiency of African American students are products of the educational system and are involved in its perpetuation (Murray & Herrnstein, 1992; Ravitch, 1990; Schlesinger, 1990). Since schooling is structured around Eurocentric norms and values which overtly or covertly include notions of cultural superiority (Banks, 1993; Gordon, 1993a; Ravitch, 1993), it is no wonder that African American students are viewed as less-than-center by those who dominate the cultural center. In fact, African American students and culture are in the oppositional position that highlights Eurocentric culture and reflects what European culture is not (hooks, 1995; Morrison, 1993). Consequently, African American students by definition become the deficient Other in a system that has marginalized them from its very inception (Dubois, 1910, 1984; Gordon, 1993b;.Nell, 1972; Washington, 1972).

Fortunately, multicultural education holds some thoughtful concepts applicable to the research on and education of African American students (Delpit, 1992; Ladson-Billings 1992). Banks (1991) presents a transformational curriculum that requires educators to consider and frame teaching and learning with multiple cultural perspectives. More specifically, Boykin (1984), Gordon (1993a), King (1994), Ladson-Billings (1990), and Shade (1981) put forward the concept that African American culture, rather than being an inadequate basis for the tasks of education, can instead provide a culturally relevant pedagogical framework for the

successful educational achievement of the African American student. However, the recognition of African American culture as a valuable and viable cultural norm requires a paradigm shift in cultural values (Banks & Banks, 1995). It requires that the Eurocentric culture and values of the educational system be decentered, allowing for the dynamic use of multiple cultural perspectives (Banks, 1995) reflective of the learner's cultural base and prior knowledge.

Cultural knowledge is certainly prior learning (Gordon, 1993a) and educators and educational researchers from diverse perspectives (Dewey, 1934; Fleming and Levie, 1978; Gagne & Briggs, 1974; Scandura, 1983) acknowledge the importance of prior learning for the acquisition of new knowledge. Therefore, cultural knowledge is understanding which can facilitate further learning. Instruction and curricula embedded in the social context of the learners themselves also may create a less alien grounding for learning, increasing the motivation to learn (Bell, 1994; Castenell, 1984; Cummins, 1986). The validation of student cultural norms may also increase self recognition, which in the hands of a thoughtful teacher may improve self-esteem (Ladson-Billings, 1990; King, 1994).

Moreover, teaching and learning from the position of the African American student may increase the likelihood of success since a history of racism and collective anger must certainly have an impact on the African American's conscious and unconscious relationship to schooling (Ogbu, 1992; Franklin, 1989). Yet proponents of the educational status quo are slow to acknowledge the viability of other cultural norms in the classroom. Thus, the African American, and other marginalized student populations, are maligned by proponents of educational hegemony, and then blamed for their lack of achievement in and resistance to a situation which does not support nor recognize their cultural propensities or talents (Bowers and Flinders, 1990; King, 1991.)

In response King (1994) poses the question of "What should be the purpose of schooling for African American and other ethnic minority students?" (p. 25). Her analysis points to the transformation of the educational system and the society that perpetuates ideas and practices of cultural superiority. King's perspective puts transformative education in a pivotal position that is based on both the traditional African American cultural belief in social justice and the need to create a new society with humane values for the future. She states,

> Moreover, African American students need forms of education that permits them to *choose* collective liberation and survival as a goal and to see this as part of a larger struggle for social change (p. 30).

In a discussion of equity pedagogy in multicultural education Banks and Banks (1995) agree with King. They state that schools that will help students of diverse racial and class backgrounds learn basic skills requires new ways of teaching. However, they maintain that new ways of teaching imposed on old ways of thinking will not yield the education needed for citizens of a complex and democratic society. Students must be able to reflect on, understand, and act on their understanding about the society in which they live.

> Equity pedagogy creates an environment in which students can acquire, interrogate, and produce knowledge and envision new possibilities for the use of that knowledge for societal change (p. 153).

In short, equity pedagogy and the construction of knowledge interact to enable the African American student to create meaning. However, most importantly, through the construction of knowledge students are challenged to

change the conditions and purpose of education and society. Thus schooling is not only based on the interests of the students, but is also *in* the interest of the students. African American students often know or sense that the present day curriculum and instructional methods serve to perpetuate a subordinate status for African American students . In 1994 a fourteen year old African American middle school student said to me, "School ain't about Black people. It's boring stuff about boring people. They don't teach you about nothing real." Upon further inquiry, I found "real" meant relevant. This student was alienated by the fact that she went to school to learn from people and about people who either didn't understand or didn't care enough about her or African Americans to include her/their African American ways of knowing and doing in the curriculum or the instructional methods. How much more engaging might it to be for this student to be involved in a project in which she helps to construct meaning and reality that is in her interest and for the transformation of society?

The Arts in Education

Transformation requires imagination to envision new liberatory and culturally relevant instructional methods, to dream of a new inclusive social structure, to hope to be a people guided by moral principles devoted to the fullest development of human potential. The arts are a human form of expression which has at their center the cultivation of the imagination. Dewey (1934) explains the transformative nature of the artistic process.

> ...what is evoked is not just quantitative, or just more energy, but is qualitative, a transformation of energy into thoughtful action, through assimilation of meanings from the background of past experiences (p. 60).

Dewey's (1934) statement describes the process also needed for social change, which is a creative process. Specifically speaking on the arts and knowledge construction Greene (1995) posits that the aesthetic experiences of the arts are connected to and interpreted through former experiences. Further, participation in the arts provides ways to see things anew, to re-vision ourselves as subjects, to construct new meaning, to reconceive reality,

> Made aware of ourselves as questioners, as meaning makers, as persons engaged in constructing and reconstructing realities with those around us, we may communicate to students the notion that reality is multiple perspectives and that the construction of it is never complete (pp. 130-131).

The arts are an individual and a collective process, both reflecting reality and promoting possibilities in the culture. Furthermore, aesthetic experience integrates cognitive and affective ways of knowing and doing. The arts embrace emotion, providing a space for the subtitles of intuitiveness, human relationships, and the feelings necessary to care about social change (Reimer, 1992).

In relationship to the African American learner the arts have many connections to the cultural knowledge of the community and can provide numerous possibilities for a culturally relevant pedagogy. African American culture stresses a universalistic, person-oriented, and intuitive perspective (Shade, 1981) and values the elements of affect, cooperation, and creativity (Shade, 1992). These same values are intrinsic to the arts.

More specifically, the art of drama includes many forms, values, and ideas that are aspects of African American culture. Baber(1987) points out the dramatic nature of African American communication styles. "Drama is endemic to the

artistry of Black communication" (p. 85). Gay (1987) highlights the performance base of African American culture, focusing on its dynamic style, holistic attitudes, depth of feeling, poetic and prosaic vernacular, and expressive movement. In essence, drama as a way of knowing and doing is an African American cultural predisposition. Consequently, if we want to explore pedagogy that is relevant to the African American student, the connections between African American culture and drama should not be overlooked.

The Research Project

This paper is analysis of a project which involved African American middle school students in a drama program. The dramatic experience was based on the stories of their lives and their community. The students were trained in performance skills, participated in the development of a script, and performed and toured the production to local schools. As a participant observer I was able to see the benefits of culturally relevant instruction. The students were excited, committed, and motivated to learn and to achieve. Stimulated by the creative techniques of drama and the empowerment of self expression, they became aware of their own possibility as community members, learners and artists. This was a powerful outcome.

However, what the project also points to is the validity of the need for transformation of the schools and the society. Students who were momentarily subjects of their educational process were returned to a school in which the student is the passive recipient of education, rather than the active agent. When speaking of the oppressed Freire (1970) states "they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform" (p. 34). Since there was no effort made to transform the instruction or curriculum in the classrooms to which these students returned, and there was no program of critical analysis of the roles that these students might play in making

social change, students had no resources with which to deal with the contradictions of schooling.

Shor (1993) gives an example of a transformed classroom that parallels the culturally relevant learning environment that may be successful for the African American student. He describes the values in the classroom as (a.) participatory, students are actively involved; (b.) situated, the course materials are rooted in the student's thought and language; (c.) critical, discussion encourages self-reflection and social-reflection; (d.) democratic, discourse is constructed by teacher and students; (f.) desocialization, student silence and passivity are unlearned; (g.) multicultural, a recognition of diversity and the legacy of discrimination and inequality based on race, class, and gender; (h.) research-oriented, teacher is observant of the speech, behaviors, and conditions of the students; (i.) activist, active formats and action responses to inquiry whenever possible; (j.) affective, emotional development is as important as cognitive development. As will be shown the RSP project incorporated many of these dynamics. Meanwhile, student accounts of their regular classrooms convey very few of the attributes.

Since the project and the script were centered around an anti-drug message the students looked at the issue of drugs, dealers, and violence in their lives and in the African American community. Students examined the subject through discussions, sharing stories, scene development, improvisations, and development and analysis of the script. However, McLaren and da Silva (1993) state that the task of a critical educator is to provide conditions whereby the learner can not only explore his or her reality, but the history of the people and events which were instrumental in forming the reality of the present. Little in the RSP project uncovered the relationships of power that create the violence and the economic and social connections that support drugs, leaving the students without a thorough analysis of the situation. Unfortunately, the schedule of teaching acting skills, script

analysis, rehearsing, choreography and dance rehearsals, and touring in a seven week program prohibited a thoroughly critical pedagogy.

Although the students were able to discuss change as it related to them individually and to their families, there was little understanding in the need or process of collective social action. Further, little connection was developed between the issue of drugs and violence to the other factors of domination and subordination that affect the students. In other words, the dialectical relationships of the individual, the group, and the society in the process of social change were absent or minimized. These are issues that subjects of historical change, empowered learners, even as young as middle school age, need to begin to understand in order to develop and maintain agency, in order to learn about their historically situated self interest and that of society (Freire & Macedo, 1995). Consequently, the respondents in this study, unsupported by the knowledge of their individual and collective power returned to classrooms with feelings of frustration and passive resistance. One student said, "Most teachers don't listen. It makes you frustrated, you don't want to do the work" (5. 34. 893). From the perspective of the student this is certainly an indictment of "banking education"(Freire, 1970) that denies the learner's agency. This statement also demonstrates the need for instruction that both actively seeks student voice and informs students of their own individual and collective ability to construct knowledge and create change in themselves and in others (Banks, 1993 ; hooks,1995; McLaren, 1993).

A Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Imagine, if you will, that you are a 13 to 15 year old eight grade student in a large urban middle school. Lots of times school seems boring and irrelevant, or stressful. As a matter of fact, you're flunking language arts or even home economics, of all things. You've even been put out of a class or two because you got

[1]bored enough to be disruptive. You've been labeled "at-risk" by some, special education by others, regular track by still others, or mean, difficult, a problem, a challenge, an African American, or the Other.

Imagine that you had the opportunity to leave the school building in the mornings to be involved in the RSP Drama Program.[1] Skipping home economics and language arts, you get on a bus to go to an African American cultural arts center not far from school for a class in drama. Every morning you arrive with some of your friends to enter a space as large as a gymnasium. You work with two teachers, and occasionally a playwright, three designers, and a stage manager who expect you to be successful, creative, to work independently, follow through, and to be capable of making appropriate decisions.

Every morning you build a collaborative team spirit in a warm-up period of games, running, and dancing to rap, salsa, and rhythm and blues music. Sometimes you exhibit your grace, style, and dance mastery by leading the group. You share your stories and discuss community issues as a part of your learning. Later you show your intellectual and emotional depth by creating characters and stories in dramatic scenes and improvisations. You can quietly talk to your friends, move around, or go to the bathroom without asking permission. Both your peers and the instructors expect you to return promptly because you may miss your part as either performer or audience member. You do return because you have been a part of establishing your level of necessary responsibility to the group.

You have been told that at the end of seven weeks you will have participated in creating an anti-drug play that you and your group will tour to other schools.

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[1] Names of the program and the students haave been changed for confidentiality.

You are a part of the community effort to keep kids off drugs. On top of everything else, you will perform your work for the students of your own school.

If you can imagine all of this you are thinking from the perspective of students in this study. The above is a composite picture of individual students and their mornings in a drama program developed to evoke discipline, confidence, and motivation. The description is also an example of culturally relevant instruction for African American students. The learning environment was transformed to meet the cultural interests and needs of the students. Although cultural congruence was not the aim of the project, it was the result. As such, the program should be examined for the ways in which African American culture was used and how it effected learning for the students.

Shade (1992) delineates a learning system for African American students. A synthesis of her program proposes instructional process which includes physicality, variability of tasks, performance based responses, allowance for creativity, expressiveness, imagination, and intuitive learning. Furthermore, Shade states that the emphasis on behavioral conformity with an environment that reduces social interactions alienates African American students who's cultural proclivity stresses social relationships. Drama is an art form that demands social connections. Movement, performance, imagination, expressiveness, and intuition are at the core of the dramatic experience.

Likewise, Allen and Boykin (1992) outline nine dimensions of African American culture, seven of which were abundantly apparent in the drama program: (a.) movement expressiveness, (b) verve or responsive to high levels of stimulation and variability, (c) affect, an emphasis on emotions, (d) communalism , (e) expressive individualism, a development of a distinctive personality and spontaneous behaviors, (f) orality, and (g) social time perspective in which time is contextual and social. All of these aspects of culture are inherent the RSP program

and in the performing arts, which speaks to their viability as a model of pedagogy for some African American students.

In view of the connections between African American culture and drama the aim of my research was to understand how this culturally relevant instruction would affect the learners involved in the process. The questions I posed were to get at the phenomenological meaning that the students had of their dramatic experiences. The following questions were the base of the inquiry.

1. In what ways do students interpret their drama experience, i.e. relevant, meaningful, etc.
2. How are the students' experiences in drama connected to their lives and backgrounds?
3. In what ways are their dramatic experiences different than other school experiences?

Methodology

As the playwright for the project I was a participant observer, My task was to listen to the language of the students and to collect stories from their imaginations and their lives, in order to create a dramatic piece in an authentic voice. Afterward, as researcher, I conducted semi-structured interviews with fourteen students and selected ten of the students for further interviews. These ten eighth graders (5 females, 5 males) were self-defined African Americans, who had difficulties in school ranging from occasional or perpetual alienation and boredom to disruptive behaviors. After an in-case analysis of the data from the observations and interviews, a cross-case analysis revealed that the students' statements most often clustered around three theoretical concepts: cultural relevance, self-efficacy, and creativity. Thus evolved a theoretical framework in which the attributes of drama as culturally relevant instruction for African American learners releases creativity,

which in turn engages the interaction between self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation (figure 1).

The Students

Derrick is a talkative 14 year old, who likes to organize others to get things done. However, he finds school to be too "stressful" (4.22.480) with "too much work you have to rush to do" (4.22.481). He likes to sing, and sings in his church choir. Since he's gotten into drama he has also learned to enjoy acting. What he likes to be able to do in a learning situation is to express his opinion and have the teacher listen and respect his ideas. His idea of a good teacher is one who is patient and thorough.

> She teaches to where I understand and she makes sure , like, that you understand, and she won't leave you until you understand (4.27.644).

Cassandra is a self-deprecating 14 year old. The only thing she likes about school is being with her boyfriend. She has no academic subjects that interest her. As a matter of fact, she's flunking language arts. She has never acted before, but sings and dances well. In the RSP program she discovered she can do a lot more things than she thought she could. She never realized the significance of the fact that she is talented at singing, dancing, and acting. It gave her a new sense of pride. She found the RSP program offered her a way to discover new talents and to be creative.

> I like thinking up different types of things that people never heard of, different things other people never thought of, or heard of. Yeah, I like being creative (1.8.5-9).

TayTay is a 14 year old male. Although he is just over five feet tall, his favorite school activity is basketball. He attributes his B average to his parents who

encourage him to try hard. He is very concerned with appearances and gaining the approval of others. The main reason he gave for doing a good show is so that everybody will see their talent. Among the actors he was the most resistant to portraying a character that he thought of as a bad image or that might be perceived by his peers as negative. His favorite part of the drama program is the music and dancing

Veronica is a 13 year old who doesn't like school at all. She stated that she has raised her little brother and has basically taken care of herself since her mother left home. Consequently, from her perspective, she already knows what she needs to know and is tired of being taught the same things over again, year after year. She also strongly objected to the role of the passive student. When talking about a certain student teacher she bristled.

> She came in and she changed everything around and then expected you to do what she laid out for you and then flunked you! What do you think about that (3.16.281)?

She got into the drama program because she was not getting along with the teacher and was taken out of the class. Her attitude changed dramatically when she talked about drama. The drama program was "pleasure and fun", helped her express her feelings, and lifted her spirits (3.18.355-366).

Richard is a 15 year old. His favorite thing to do in school is to hang out with his friends. He demonstrated reading difficulties when he stumbled through the script during the early readings, but repetition and commitment to the task led to a well developed characterization and performance. However, his favorite classroom activity is writing. He likes to "pick any old thing out of the air" (5.28.82) and make up stories. The creative process interests him.

> You think you don't have nothing,...and then stuff just start coming out of everywhere (5.28.698).

He enjoys that same sense of discovery in drama when he uncovers abilities and behaviors that he didn't know he had. He says that acting helps him to learn more about himself.

> Sometimes when you step out in the part you play, you think you're a quiet person, then you start getting loud and really moving and stuff (5.32.818).

He discovered that drama also helps him to understand other people.

> They might have something inside that they never thought they had before. Sometimes you get to know how they really are. Maybe sometime they get really excited...and they have problems at home, you know the problems make them nervous (5.32.830-835).

Teresa is a talented 14 year old. She draws and writes poetry and songs. Her creative activities give her a sense of independence and self-efficacy.

> I like when you're drawing, you can draw anything that you want. And when you're writing, you can write anything you want. And when you're acting, you act the way you want (6.44.1281).

Her favorite class is the RSP project because the instructors know and use the music and dance that appeals to her and her classmates. Her least favorite class is language arts based on her perception of the teacher's lack of caring.

Jay is 14 years old, a natural actor, who also plays basketball and runs track. Within the last year he spent a night in the juvenile jail that made him rethink his path. Since that time he has tried to change his behavior. He finds that positive behaviors get him privileges that he never had before when he was in trouble. In fact, he has become "the teacher's pet" in one of his classes. The teacher lets him read the bulletin and help her. He enjoys being the "head of the class" (11.70.2207).

However, he is obviously in a process of transition because during the time of the drama project he missed three classes because he was in detention. However, Jay showed only commitment and discipline in the RSP project. He demanded on task behavior from other participants. He also learned about himself.

> I can do good, instead of people labeling me a trouble maker. I can accomplish anything if I put my mind to it, like I put my mind to this play (11.71.2276).

Pat is a very friendly 13 year old. More than anything she likes to hang out and be with her friends. She loves to laugh and to play all kinds of little games, like throwing a tissue at a boy and then innocently looking away. Her favorite class in school is the RSP project. It was a place to "let out your feelings" (15.33.881) and have fun. Furthermore, she echoed many of the students in the enjoyment of the creativity and variability of drama.

> You can act at playing a fool. It's like theater, you know, you can be anything in theater! You can be different characters; you don't have to be yourself all the time (15.36.971-975).

Brenda is an articulate 14 year old, whose favorite activities are hanging out with her friends and talking on the phone. She gets bored with school every day. "All they give me is work. It could be funner, if they made it funner!" (8.56.1726). For example, her least favorite class was home economics where they mostly did writing assignments. She thought it would be a lot more interesting if they at least got to do some cooking. A class she did enjoy was her history class because she learned more about Black history. Brenda has been in other drama classes and enjoys acting. She also writes poems about "boys, and girls, and the sky..." (8.54.1643). The exciting thing about writing poetry and acting is that her voice and perspective are present in her work.

> I just like it that I get to make something up myself. It's coming from my point of view and not somebody else's (8.54.1647).

Craig is a 14 year old. His favorite school activity is hanging out at lunchtime, recess, and talking to the girls, even though "some girls talk a lot" (12.33.865). He also likes to work out problems in math, particularly in geometry. He also likes art and loves to draw shoes. He plans to make his own shoes someday. Among the other students Craig has the reputation of being "a gangster" at school. He is often absent or late to school and to class, has been in detention, and suspended from school for misbehavior in class. In building a character Craig observes people in his environment and then applies it to his characterization.

> If I see a bully, or somebody selling drugs on the street, I just look at that to see how they act and bring it back here (12.36.968).

Craig was affected by the content of the script in which parents and children were trapped by drugs in a dead end place. He felt the script showed "what might happen if you do this or that...It just helps you out, [knowing] that all people could be like that" (12.37.1005).

Student Perceptions

Creativity

The overwhelming and typically adolescent response to the experience in the RSP project was that it was "fun". As previously noted, an analysis of data pointed to the roots of fun being in a creative, culturally relevant pedagogy that tapped the students' self-efficacy. Courtney (1986) describes the attributes of drama that he terms generic skills; skills that are fundamental to both education and other aspects of life. Courtney states that creativity is a generic skill that helps the learner to

develop innovative solutions. He also incorporates intuition, discovery, imagination, assessment, and action as a part of the drama experience.

Eisner (1980) describes conceptualization, transformation, and expression as the cognitive processes involved in the creation of an art form. Eisner explains that this process in the act of artistic expression is non-linear and is altered by the medium. Thus, the artist generates new ideas during the process of creation. This description also matches the intuition and spiraling logic of the African American reasoning process expressed by Bennett (1990). Herein lies another point for the use of the arts in the learning of the African American student. Unfortunately, like artistic expression, African American students are marginalized, and their modes of expression are similarly devalued.

The connections between the teachers and students in the project may also be a part of the explanation for why the students viewed the experience as positive and fun. The relationships were based on a very focused goal, which was the performance of a play. Most importantly was the respect for the creative process among artists, both teachers and students. The RSP teachers, one African American male and a Caucasian female, were trained professional theater people. Consequently, they were aware of the creative process in drama that takes a certain amount of autonomy and freedom for construction and expression. Students were encouraged to experiment with music, movement, dance, characters, words, and stories and responded positively to both the form of instruction as well as the content. There was also a lot of joking and teasing that built rapport between the students and teachers. Finally, since one of the teachers was also in the play, he served as a model for the student actors. He made mistakes, forgot lines, experimented and struggled through the development of his character, just as the student actors did. Consequently, Richard was able to respond positively to the risk taking necessary for the creative process.

It's not like if you mess up, they don't start saying something all bad and stuff (5.30.745).

Richard's comment relates to another issue germane to African American learning and cultural styles and to the pedagogy of the RSP project. Richard was comparing the RSP class to another drama class he had taken in which he was a marginalized minority. The content and relationships amongst the students, and between the students and the teacher had been frustrating for Richard, and he dropped out. While other Black students among the RSP group had been in the drama class at different times, or in similar classes, and had fared well and enjoyed the experience, Richard's experience of alienation suggests that there are issues at play in the RSP project in addition to the dramatic activities. Namely, although drama has many connections to the culture of the African American, it is most effective for at least some African American learners when it is infused with an afrocentric perspective, or at least with a recognition of African American learning and cultural styles.

The students in the program were also motivated by self expression, of constructing meaning from their own perspective. They explored the various media of art, dance, writing, and acting through which they interpreted and explained their ideas and feelings. This pattern of communication through artistic means is indicative of the synthesis of affect and symbolic imagery as a part of African American learning styles (Bell, 1994).

Furthermore, creative expression through the arts provides a vehicle for student voice and empowerment. Giroux and McLaren (1986) explain "voice" as the aspect of self-expression through which students confirm their own class, cultural, racial, and gender identities. McLaren (1994) asserts that voice is both an internal and external process. Internally voice gives students a way to order and understand his/her reality. Externally voice is a vehicle for the interchange and

construction of knowledge. "Situated historically and mediated culturally" (p.226) the voice of the student, gives the teacher an understanding of how the students define themselves and name experience. Likewise, in the case of the RSP project the students as actors internally structured and externally presented their view of the world.

Doyle (1993) states that an analysis of the meanings and purpose of the script can form the basis of a critical pedagogy. Indeed, there were a variety of attitudes and visions expressed that were reflective of internal student voice as they constructed understanding. The experience touched them as family members, members of a community, and as adolescents in middle school. The script in which a drug and alcohol addicted mother must struggle to save her own life in order to save her daughter initiated deep reflection for Jay.

> **There is a character in the play, you know that kind of relates to my mother, who had a problem with drinking. You know when I see that, I'm like, Wow! It's kind of deep. I watched my mama do stuff 'cause she was just too messed up, you know (11.75.2415).**

Jay was also empowered by presenting a positive message to the children in his community.

> **I think this could make a message to stay positive and don't be like these people in the play" (11.75.2408).**

His positive attitude toward delivering the message of the play to other schools was based on his own life experiences and the African American interest in group survival (Shade, 1982).

The African American language also created a sense of community and demonstrates how voice is mediated by culture. Students were validated for using and experimenting with their own language forms. As actors they were encouraged to change the language of the play to create more authentic voices for the characters. Cassandra states,

> Black people have their own language. Other people don't think so, but I do. A Black person says a thing and another [non-Black] person wouldn't understand (1.7.44).

Self-efficacy

The importance of self-efficacy as an outcome of the program is that it is reflective of the empowered learner which critical theorists (Freire, 1973; Giroux, 1988; McLaren, 1993; Shor, 1987) and transformative multicultural educators advocate (Banks & Banks, 1995; Gordon, 1993; King, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1990). Bandura (1982) describes self-efficacy as a person's judgment of how well s/he can perform tasks that are required to deal with situations s/he may find. Bandura cites four modes of influence on self-efficacy: enactive attainments, vicarious experiences of observing the performance of others; verbal persuasion; and physiological states. All of these influences were active in the RSP project and should be a part of any educational experience.

Enactive attainments means that prior success breeds the idea that future success is possible. Many of the students liked drama because they had prior positive experiences. Brenda said what many of the other respondents said.

> I like it because I'm good at it. I know how to do this; I know how to dance. I know how to clown (8.56.1695).

In view of the successful outcome of the project, Brenda's statement also reinforces the need for culturally relevant instruction. Ladson-Billings & Henry (1990) advocate the use of methods that draw from the cultural roots of the students. Through language, dance, narratives, and social interactions the relevance of the class influenced self-efficacy.

In terms of vicarious experience TayTay, like many of the students, valued and learned from their observations of others in the group.

> ...seeing other people not being afraid to show what they can do...I see other people when they do their parts and I think I can do it (2.13.151).

As an aspect of African American culture TayTay's experience is about the cooperative nature of a high context culture in which human relationships are central (Bennett, 1990).

Honest verbal persuasion came from both teachers and other students during the periods of feedback after rehearsal, theater games, improvisations, and scenes. They were also encouraged by the audience responses to their work and the interest and involvement their families showed in their activities. Jay found persuasion in the fact that he got the lead and inspired his grandmother pride.

> I felt proud. I didn't think I was going to get anything that high [the lead role]. And when I found out that I was playing George I was happy and I told my Grandma that I was the lead in the play, and it sure makes her feel good when I'm staying out of trouble (11.73.2339).

Finally in terms of the physiological abilities, alluded to by many researchers (Boykin, 1984; Ladson-Billings, Shade, 1992) the students demonstrated their

proficiency through dance and movement. In fact, they never stopped moving. Even in their seats they found rhythms and activities to ward off being still. They experimented with the possibilities of motion and locomotion, and they learned and experimented with movement in relationship to character.

Dance is a significant component of the lives of African American youth. With deeply embedded African roots (Southern, 1983) African American youth have historically developed dances to be performed at community events, parties, and clubs. The students in the RSP program were no exception. They choreographed and performed dances for both the rehearsals and the shows. Consequently, the students in this project had multiple sources of self-efficacy that showed in their attitudes about themselves in class, in their performance, and in the after-performance discussions with the audiences.

A correlate of self-efficacy is intrinsic motivation. Csikszentmihalyi and Schiefele (1992) state that high skill levels, high challenge, and successful experience generate intrinsic motivation, which they term a "flow experience". The flow experience generates intrinsic rewards that are autotelic, the reward is innate. When people are in the flow they are doing what they want to do more than anything else.

> [Intrinsic motivation is] consciousness in which high levels of control, concentration, unselfconsciousness, and a strong sense of involvement are experienced (p. 181).

It should be pointed out that a creative and culturally relevant learning environment has the potential for creating intrinsic motivation. It was certainly true for the students in the RSP program.

Conclusion

These students were involved in an instructional process that was inherently culturally relevant based on the core values of African American culture (Allen & Boykin, 1992; Ladson-Billings & Henry, 1990) and the objectives and structures of drama (Boal, 1985; Courtney, 1986; Way, 1967). By creating a script based on their stories, from their perspectives, in their voice and language, with African American musical and poetic forms, the students were able to recognize themselves and their culture as valued and become active agents in the construction and expression of knowledge. The tour of the show to other schools to entertain and educate other children fulfilled a traditional African American cultural interest in group survival (Shade, 1981). Moreover, the emphasis on affect, communalism, intuitive reasoning, creativity, kinesthetic learning, performance, and a synthesis of affect and symbolic imagery was reflective of the essence of African American culture.

Finally, there was a sense of joy and commitment that can only be present in empowering situations. The empowerment was based on a perceptions of self-efficacy, which engaged intrinsic motivation. In this context of learning and culture these students successfully created a work of art in performance. They got positive validation for their strengths, not criticism for their weaknesses. So, the very students who were considered to be failing, difficult, challenging, and/or disruptive were able to focus their cooperative efforts to create stories, dances, and characters, read, memorize, rehearse, listen, follow directions, and motivate themselves and each other to follow through, complete, perform, tour a dramatic piece, and to coherently answer audience questions about drama, community, drugs, violence, and school.

Castenell (1984) expresses a relevant issue. He states that motivation to achieve is shaped by cultural context. People from different cultures respond

differently to different social cues. Consequently, African American student achievement motivation should be viewed in the context of African American objectives. The students of the RSP program certainly validate that claim.

Limitations

The limitations of this study rests on the size of the group of respondents. With such a small population as a reference, educators and researchers can expect to gain only a very small perspective on topics and theories as comprehensive as culturally relevant instruction, African American culture, and artistic expression and instruction. Consequently, there is need for further similar studies with African American children in similar sites with students of all cultures in similar sites to examine the role of culture in learning and to develop and revalue the role of the arts in education, particularly in the education of children whose culture stresses the core values and characteristics of the arts.

Moreover, a critique of this program can only be limited to a look at the absence of critical pedagogy since the theoretical base of critical theory was not a part of the program's original design. The praxis of a culturally relevant instruction through drama for African American students yielded a transformative pedagogy that was participatory, situated, activist, research oriented, democratic, desocializing, critical, multicultural, and affective, all ten of the aspects of a critical pedagogy that Shor (1993) delineates. However, if critical pedagogy means instruction that enables the student to be aware of him/herself "as part of a larger struggle for social change" (King, 1994, p. 30), then programs like the RSP project can benefit from a more thoroughly developed liberatory curriculum design. In particular, the critical, desocializing, and multicultural elements of the project should integrate reflection on the historical and social contexts of African Americans, and the potential for the students to be an integral part of the process of

change. Research on such a project would provide provocative information for the conversations on the praxis at the intersections of critical pedagogy, the arts, and culturally relevant instruction.

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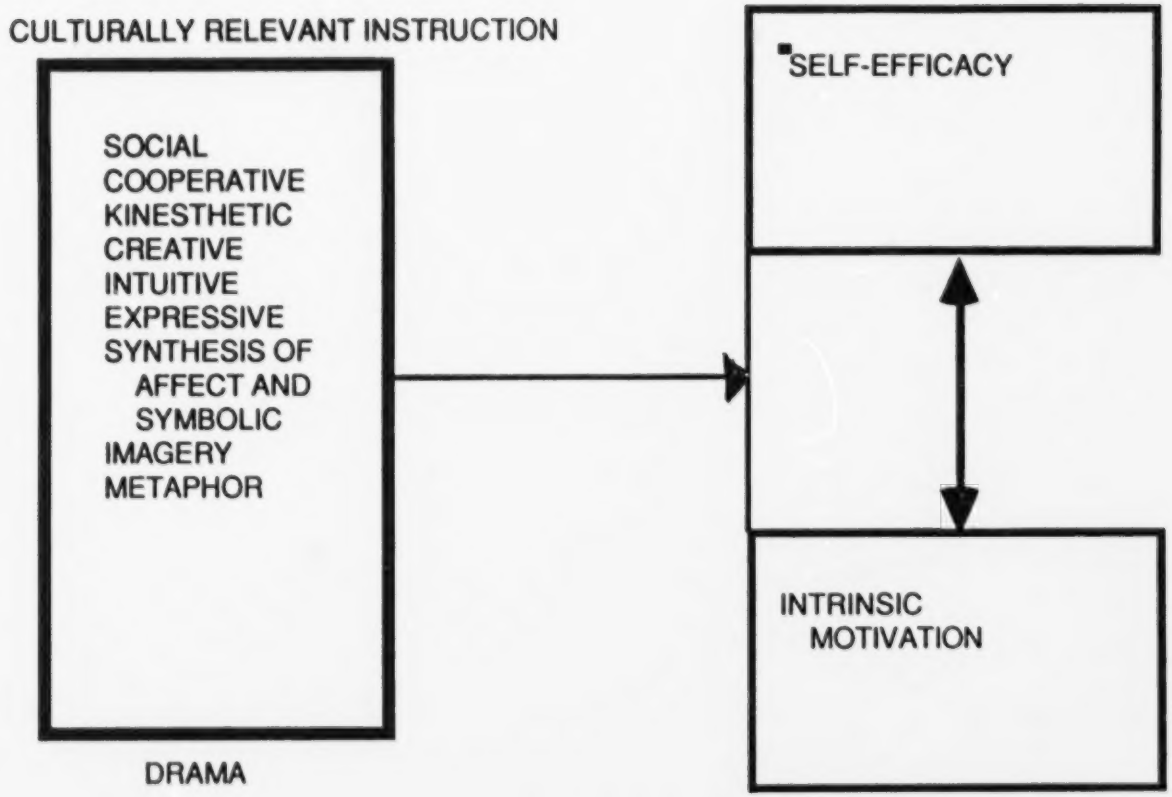

Figure 1

Drama as a culturally relevant instructional method for African American students evokes self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation.